PERSPECTIVES
ON LABOUR AND INCOME

Fact-sheet on work absences

There are many kinds of absence. Some, such as annual vacations, are generally considered beneficial for both the organization and the employee. Since they are usually scheduled, their effect on the organization can be fairly easily absorbed; the same can be said of statutory holidays. Other absences, such as those caused by illness and family-related demands, are generally unavoidable, as are those due to inclement weather.

'Absenteeism'—a term used to refer to absences that are avoidable, habitual and unscheduled—is a source of irritation to employers and co-workers. Such absences are disruptive to proper work scheduling and output, and costly to an organization and the economy as a whole.

Although absenteeism is widely acknowledged to be a problem, it is not easy to quantify. The dividing line between avoidable and unavoidable is difficult to draw, and absenteeism generally masquerades as legitimate absence. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) can provide measures of time lost because of 'personal reasons,' that is, illness or disability, and personal or family responsibilities. However, within these categories, it is impossible to determine if an absence is avoidable or unscheduled. LFS data on absences for personal reasons can, however, be analyzed to identify patterns or trends that indicate the effect of absenteeism (see *Data source and definitions*).

Recent trends—1997 to 2003

Estimates from the Labour Force Survey reveal a steady rising trend in both work absence incidence and time lost for personal reasons (own illness or disability, and other personal and family demands) between 1997 and 2002.[1] Several factors accounted for the rising trend: notably, the aging of the workforce; the growing share of women in the workforce, especially mothers with young children; high stress among workers,[2] and the increasing prevalence of generous sick and family-related leave at the workplace (Chart).

In an average week in 1997, excluding women on maternity leave, about 5.5% (484,000) of all full-time employees holding one job were absent from work for all or part of the week for personal reasons. By 2002, the figure had risen to 7.6% (771,000) (Table 1). Total work time missed for these reasons also rose steadily, from 3.0% of the weekly scheduled work time in 1997 to 3.6% in 2002. Extrapolated over the full year, work time lost for personal reasons increased from the equivalent of 7.4 days per worker in 1997 to 9.0 days in 2002. Work absences due to own illness or disability as well as those due to other personal or family responsibilities witnessed continuous increases during the period.

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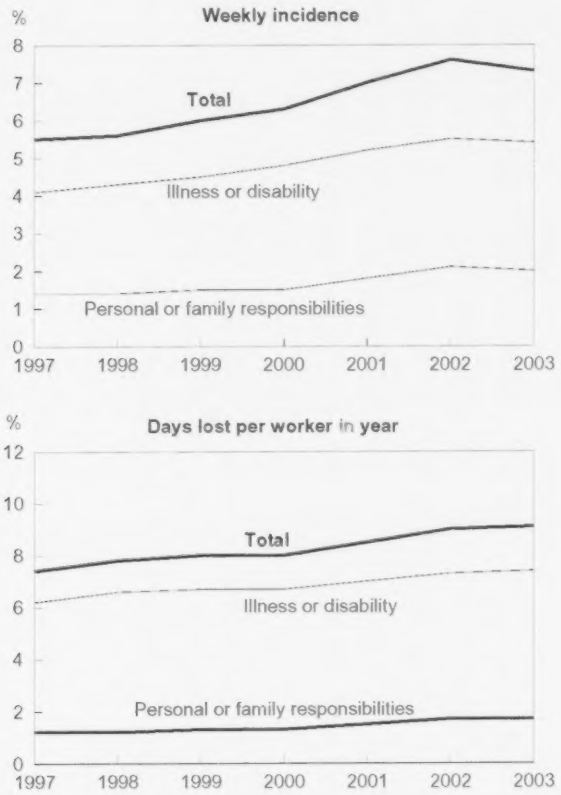
Chart: Work absence rates, 1997 to 2003



Source: Labour Force Survey

The steadily rising trend stalled in 2003. That year, the incidence fell to 7.3%, but the days lost per worker (9.1 days) were a shade higher than the year before, suggesting that absence durations in 2003 were generally longer. Whether this is the beginning of a new trend is too early to speculate.

Variations in absence rates in 2003

Absence for personal reasons differs among various worker groups. Several factors are responsible; among the principal ones are working conditions (for example, the physical environment, degree of job stress, employer-employee relations, collective agreement provisions, work schedules); adequacy and affordability of community facilities such as child-care centres and public transportation; family circumstances, especially the presence of preschool children and other dependent family members; and physical health of the worker, a factor closely related to age. Measuring the effects of these and other contributing factors is not easy since many are not captured by the LFS. However, some insight is gained by examining personal absences in 2003 by selected demographic characteristics, occupation and industry, and other attributes such as union and job status.

Demographic differences

In 2003, excluding women on maternity leave, an estimated 7.3% (760,000) of full-time employees missed some work each week for personal reasons: 5.4% for own illness or disability, and 2.0% for personal or family responsibilities (Table 2). As a result, full-time employees lost about 3.6% of their work time each week.

On average, each full-time employee lost 9.1 days over the year for personal reasons (about 7.4 for own illness or disability, and 1.7 for personal or family demands). In total, full-time employees missed an estimated 94.2 million workdays for personal reasons in 2003.

On average, men working full time lost fewer days (8.1 or 6.6 for illness or disability plus 1.5 for personal or family demands) than women full-time employees (10.5 or 8.7 plus 1.9).

The presence of preschool-aged children exerts a strong influence on work absences for personal or family responsibilities, especially for women. In such families, women employed full time lost an average of 4.5 days in 2003; men, 4.0 days.

Workdays missed because of illness or disability tended to rise with age, from an average of 5.0 days for youth (15 to 19) to 10.8 for full-time employees aged 55 to 64.

Industry and sector

Work absence rates differ by sector (public or private) and industry, with almost all of the difference emanating from illness and disability absences (Table 3). Contributing factors include the nature and

demands of the job, the male/female composition of the workforce, and the union density—the last being a strong determinant of the presence or lack of paid sick/family leave entitlements.

Full-time employees in the public sector lost more work time in 2003 for personal reasons (about 11.4 days on average) than their private-sector counterparts (8.5 days).

At the major industry level, the most workdays missed were by employees in health care and social assistance (12.8 days), transportation and warehousing (11.4), and public administration (10.7).

The lowest averages were recorded by full-time workers in the professional, scientific and technical industry (5.3 days), and in agriculture (6.2).

Occupation

Contributing factors by occupational absence rates are similar to those for industry (Table 4). Again, as by industry, differences arise mainly from time lost due to illness or disability.

The most days lost in 2003 were recorded for full-time employees in health occupations (13.0); occupations unique to production (11.1); and trades, transport and equipment operators (10.6).

Workers in managerial jobs (5.2), natural and applied sciences (6.1), and culture and recreation (6.9) recorded the fewest days lost.

Union coverage, job status, workplace size and job tenure

Full-time workers who belonged to unions or were covered by collective agreements missed almost 80% more workdays on average in 2003 for personal reasons than their non-unionized counterparts (12.8 versus 7.2) (Table 5).

Workers who considered their jobs to be permanent (and hence more likely to be unionized) lost more workdays (9.2) than those who said their jobs were not permanent (7.7).

Days lost tended to rise with workplace size, increasing from a low of 7.5 in workplaces with fewer than 20 employees (firms more likely to have low union rates) to over 10.0 in workplaces with 100 or more (firms likely to have high union rates).

Days lost tended to rise with job tenure, with almost all the differences arising from illness and disability. They rose from an average of 6.6 days among persons with tenure of up to one year to more than 10.0 days among those with over nine years (the latter group likely being older).

Province and CMA

Work absence levels differed by geographic area (Table 6), with most of the variation again arising from illness or disability.

Full-time employees in Quebec and Saskatchewan lost the most work time in 2003 (10.6 and 10.5 days). Those in Prince Edward Island (7.5) and Alberta (7.9) lost the least.

Among the census metropolitan areas, workers in St. John's, Saint John, Saguenay, Montréal, Sherbrooke, Gatineau, Thunder Bay, Regina, Saskatoon and Victoria lost the most workdays (an average of more than 10 days per full-time worker). Those in Greater Sudbury, Toronto, London and Calgary lost the least time (an average of less than 8.0 days per full-time worker).

Notes

1 1997 marks the introduction of the revised Labour Force Survey questionnaire.

2 For more information on this subject, see Margot Shields, "Stress, health and the benefit of social support," *Health Reports* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 82-003-XIE) 15, no. 1, January 2004.

Also see Cara Williams, "Sources of workplace stress," *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001-XIE) 4, no. 6. June 2003 online edition.

Table 1: Absence rates for full-time paid workers by sex, 1997 to 2003, excluding maternity leave

	Incidence*			Inactivity**			Days lost per worker in year†		
	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities
	%			%			days		
Both sexes									
1997	5.5	4.1	1.4	3.0	2.5	0.5	7.4	6.2	1.2
1998	5.6	4.3	1.4	3.1	2.6	0.5	7.8	6.6	1.2
1999	6.0	4.5	1.5	3.2	2.7	0.5	8.0	6.7	1.3
2000	6.3	4.8	1.5	3.2	2.7	0.5	8.0	6.7	1.3
2001	7.0	5.2	1.8	3.4	2.8	0.6	8.5	7.0	1.5
2002	7.6	5.5	2.1	3.6	2.9	0.7	9.0	7.3	1.7
2003	7.3	5.4	2.0	3.6	3.0	0.7	9.1	7.4	1.7
Men									
1997	4.6	3.4	1.2	2.5	2.1	0.4	6.3	5.3	0.9
1998	4.9	3.7	1.2	2.7	2.3	0.4	6.9	5.8	1.0
1999	5.2	3.8	1.3	2.8	2.4	0.4	7.0	5.9	1.1
2000	5.5	4.1	1.4	2.8	2.4	0.4	7.0	5.9	1.1
2001	6.1	4.5	1.6	3.0	2.5	0.5	7.6	6.3	1.3
2002	6.6	4.7	1.9	3.2	2.6	0.6	7.9	6.4	1.6
2003	6.4	4.6	1.8	3.2	2.6	0.6	8.1	6.6	1.5
Women									
1997	6.7	5.0	1.7	3.6	3.0	0.6	9.1	7.6	1.5
1998	6.7	5.1	1.6	3.7	3.1	0.6	9.2	7.7	1.5
1999	7.1	5.3	1.7	3.8	3.2	0.6	9.5	7.9	1.6
2000	7.5	5.7	1.8	3.8	3.1	0.6	9.4	7.8	1.5
2001	8.2	6.1	2.0	3.9	3.2	0.7	9.7	8.0	1.8
2002	8.9	6.5	2.4	4.2	3.4	0.8	10.4	8.6	1.9
2003	8.6	6.4	2.2	4.2	3.5	0.7	10.5	8.7	1.9

Source: Labour Force Survey

* *Absent workers divided by total.*

** *Hours absent divided by hours usually worked.*

† *Inactivity rate multiplied by working days in year (250).*

Table 2: Absence rates for full-time paid workers by sex, age, education and presence of children, 2003, excluding maternity leave

	Incidence*			Inactivity**			Days lost per worker in year†		
	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities
	%			%			days		
Age									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
15 to 19	6.4	4.6	1.8	2.6	2.0	0.7	6.6	5.0	1.6
20 to 24	6.6	4.9	1.7	2.7	2.1	0.6	6.7	5.3	1.4
25 to 34	7.5	5.2	2.3	3.4	2.5	0.8	8.4	6.4	2.0
35 to 44	7.5	5.3	2.2	3.7	3.0	0.7	9.2	7.4	1.8
45 to 54	7.0	5.5	1.6	3.8	3.3	0.5	9.5	8.2	1.3
55 to 64	8.2	6.4	1.7	4.9	4.3	0.6	12.3	10.8	1.5
65 and over	5.3	3.4	F	3.0	2.3	F	7.5	5.7	F
Men	**6.4**	**4.6**	**1.8**	**3.2**	**2.6**	**0.6**	**8.1**	**6.6**	**1.5**
15 to 19	6.1	4.5	1.7	2.7	2.1	0.6	6.8	5.3	1.5
20 to 24	6.0	4.4	1.6	2.6	2.0	0.6	6.5	5.1	1.4
25 to 34	6.7	4.6	2.1	3.1	2.3	0.8	7.9	5.8	2.1
35 to 44	6.3	4.4	1.9	3.1	2.5	0.6	7.9	6.3	1.5
45 to 54	6.0	4.6	1.4	3.3	2.8	0.5	8.2	7.0	1.1
55 to 64	7.1	5.6	1.5	4.3	3.8	0.5	10.8	9.6	1.2
65 and over	5.2	3.5	F	3.1	2.4	F	7.7	6.0	F
Women	**8.6**	**6.4**	**2.2**	**4.2**	**3.5**	**0.7**	**10.5**	**8.7**	**1.9**
15 to 19	6.9	4.9	2.0	2.5	1.8	0.7	6.3	4.5	1.8
20 to 24	7.3	5.6	1.7	2.8	2.2	0.6	7.0	5.6	1.4
25 to 34	8.7	6.2	2.5	3.7	2.9	0.8	9.2	7.2	2.0
35 to 44	9.0	6.5	2.6	4.4	3.6	0.8	11.0	8.9	2.1
45 to 54	8.3	6.6	1.7	4.5	3.9	0.6	11.3	9.7	1.6
55 to 64	9.7	7.6	2.0	5.9	5.1	0.7	14.7	12.8	1.9
65 and over	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
Educational attainment									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Less than Grade 9	8.4	6.6	1.7	5.1	4.6	0.5	12.9	11.6	1.3
Some secondary	8.2	6.3	2.0	4.5	3.8	0.7	11.2	9.5	1.7
High school graduate	7.3	5.5	1.8	3.7	3.1	0.6	9.4	7.8	1.5
Some postsecondary	7.7	5.5	2.2	3.7	2.9	0.8	9.3	7.3	2.0
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	7.6	5.6	2.0	3.8	3.1	0.7	9.5	7.7	1.7
University degree	6.2	4.3	1.9	2.7	2.0	0.7	6.7	5.0	1.6
Presence of children									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
With children	7.7	5.3	2.5	3.8	2.9	0.9	9.5	7.3	2.2
Preschool-aged (under 5 years)	9.0	5.0	3.9	4.2	2.5	1.7	10.5	6.4	4.2
5 to 12 years	7.9	5.5	2.4	3.7	3.0	0.6	9.2	7.6	1.6
13 years and over	6.8	5.2	1.6	3.7	3.1	0.5	9.2	7.8	1.4
Without children	7.0	5.5	1.6	3.5	3.0	0.5	8.8	7.5	1.3

Source: Labour Force Survey
** Absent workers divided by total.*
*** Hours absent divided by hours usually worked.*
† Inactivity rate multiplied by working days in year (250).

Table 3: Absence rates for full-time paid workers by industry and sector, 2003, excluding maternity leave

	Incidence*			Inactivity**			Days lost per worker in year†		
	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities
	%			%			days		
All industries	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Public employees	8.8	6.8	2.0	4.5	3.8	0.8	11.4	9.4	1.9
Private employees	6.9	5.0	1.9	3.4	2.8	0.6	8.5	6.9	1.6
Goods-producing	**7.3**	**5.2**	**2.0**	**3.7**	**3.0**	**0.6**	**9.2**	**7.6**	**1.6**
Primary	5.7	3.8	1.9	3.1	2.4	0.6	7.7	6.1	1.6
Agriculture	5.9	3.6	2.4	2.5	1.8	0.7	6.2	4.4	1.7
Other	5.6	3.9	1.7	3.3	2.7	0.6	8.3	6.7	1.6
Utilities	8.0	6.1	1.9	4.0	3.3	0.6	9.9	8.3	1.6
Construction	6.4	4.5	1.9	3.4	2.7	0.7	8.5	6.7	1.8
Manufacturing	7.7	5.6	2.1	3.8	3.2	0.6	9.6	8.1	1.5
Durable	7.8	5.6	2.2	3.8	3.2	0.7	9.6	8.0	1.6
Non-durable	7.5	5.6	1.9	3.9	3.3	0.6	9.6	8.2	1.4
Service-producing	**7.4**	**5.4**	**1.9**	**3.6**	**2.9**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Trade	6.6	4.8	1.8	3.2	2.7	0.6	8.0	6.6	1.4
Wholesale	6.6	4.5	2.1	3.0	2.4	0.6	7.5	6.0	1.5
Retail	6.7	5.0	1.7	3.3	2.8	0.5	8.2	6.9	1.4
Transportation and warehousing	7.3	5.9	1.5	4.6	4.0	0.6	11.4	9.9	1.5
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	7.3	5.2	2.1	3.4	2.8	0.6	8.6	7.0	1.6
Finance and insurance	7.5	5.4	2.1	3.5	3.0	0.6	8.8	7.4	1.4
Real estate and leasing	6.6	4.5	2.1	3.1	2.3	0.8	7.6	5.7	2.0
Professional, scientific and technical	6.0	3.8	2.3	2.1	1.5	0.6	5.3	3.8	1.5
Business, building and support services	7.6	5.6	2.0	3.5	2.8	0.7	8.7	7.0	1.7
Educational services	7.9	6.0	1.9	3.8	3.0	0.8	9.4	7.6	1.9
Health care and social assistance	9.2	7.2	2.0	5.1	4.3	0.9	12.8	10.7	2.1
Information, culture and recreation	6.4	4.7	1.7	2.9	2.4	0.6	7.3	5.9	1.4
Accommodation and food services	5.8	4.1	1.6	3.0	2.3	0.7	7.6	5.9	1.7
Other services	6.4	4.4	2.0	2.8	2.1	0.6	6.9	5.3	1.6
Public administration	9.0	6.7	2.4	4.3	3.4	0.9	10.7	8.5	2.2
Federal	11.0	7.6	3.3	4.7	3.3	1.3	11.7	8.4	3.3
Provincial	8.0	6.3	1.7	3.8	3.2	0.6	9.6	8.0	1.6
Local, other	7.5	5.7	1.8	4.2	3.6	0.6	10.4	9.0	1.4

Source: Labour Force Survey
* *Absent workers divided by total.*
** *Hours absent divided by hours usually worked.*
† *Inactivity rate multiplied by working days in year (250).*

Table 4: Absence rates for full-time paid workers by occupation, 2003, excluding maternity leave

	Incidence*			Inactivity**			Days lost per worker in year†		
	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities
	%			%			days		
All occupations	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Management	4.9	3.2	1.7	2.1	1.5	0.6	5.2	3.7	1.5
Business, finance and administrative	8.1	5.8	2.3	3.7	3.0	0.7	9.1	7.4	1.8
Professional	6.6	4.5	2.1	2.7	2.1	0.6	6.7	5.3	1.4
Administrative	7.8	5.3	2.5	3.4	2.6	0.8	8.5	6.4	2.1
Clerical	8.6	6.4	2.2	4.0	3.4	0.7	10.1	8.4	1.7
Natural and applied sciences	6.3	4.3	2.0	2.4	1.9	0.5	6.1	4.8	1.3
Health	8.9	7.2	1.8	5.2	4.4	0.8	13.0	11.0	2.0
Professional	5.5	3.4	F	2.6	1.8	F	6.6	4.5	F
Nursing	9.8	8.1	1.7	6.2	5.3	0.9	15.4	13.1	2.3
Technical	7.8	5.9	1.9	4.2	3.5	0.7	10.5	8.7	1.8
Support staff	10.3	8.8	1.5	6.1	5.4	0.7	15.3	13.6	1.7
Social and public service	7.7	5.7	2.0	3.6	2.8	0.8	8.9	6.9	2.0
Legal, social and religious	8.2	6.1	2.1	3.8	3.0	0.7	9.4	7.6	1.9
Teachers and professors	7.3	5.4	1.9	3.4	2.6	0.8	8.5	6.4	2.1
Secondary and elementary	8.5	6.6	1.9	4.1	3.2	0.9	10.3	7.9	2.4
Other	4.4	2.7	1.7	1.8	1.3	0.5	4.5	3.1	1.4
Culture and recreation	7.0	5.3	1.7	2.8	2.3	0.5	6.9	5.7	1.3
Sales and service	7.0	5.2	1.8	3.6	2.9	0.7	9.0	7.3	1.7
Wholesale	5.6	3.7	1.9	2.4	1.8	0.6	6.0	4.6	1.4
Retail	6.9	5.3	1.5	3.4	2.8	0.5	8.4	7.1	1.3
Food and beverage	6.1	4.4	1.7	3.4	2.8	0.7	8.6	7.0	1.6
Protective services	6.1	4.7	1.5	3.6	2.9	0.7	9.0	7.2	1.8
Childcare and home support	9.4	6.6	2.8	4.9	3.8	1.1	12.2	9.5	2.7
Travel and accommodation	7.8	5.9	1.9	4.1	3.4	0.7	10.2	8.4	1.9
Trades, transport and equipment operators	7.5	5.6	1.8	4.2	3.6	0.6	10.6	9.0	1.5
Contractors and supervisors	5.5	3.7	1.8	2.9	2.2	0.7	7.3	5.6	1.7
Construction trades	7.8	5.6	2.2	4.4	3.7	0.8	11.1	9.2	1.9
Other trades	7.2	5.4	1.8	3.7	3.2	0.5	9.3	7.9	1.3
Transport equipment operators	7.6	6.0	1.5	4.9	4.3	0.6	12.3	10.7	1.5
Helpers and labourers	8.3	6.5	1.9	4.7	4.0	0.7	11.7	10.0	1.7
Occupations unique to primary industry	5.6	3.9	1.7	3.4	2.7	0.7	8.4	6.8	1.7
Occupations unique to production	8.5	6.3	2.2	4.4	3.7	0.7	11.1	9.3	1.8
Machine operators and assemblers	8.2	6.1	2.1	4.3	3.6	0.7	10.8	9.1	1.7
Labourers	9.7	7.3	2.5	5.1	4.0	1.0	12.6	10.1	2.5

Source: Labour Force Survey

* *Absent workers divided by total.*

** *Hours absent divided by hours usually worked.*

† *Inactivity rate multiplied by working days in year (250).*

Table 5: Absence rates for full-time paid workers by workplace size, job tenure, job status and union coverage, 2003, excluding maternity leave

	Incidence*			Inactivity**			Days lost per worker in year†		
	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities
	%			%			days		
Workplace size									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Under 20 employees	6.3	4.4	1.9	3.0	2.4	0.6	7.5	5.9	1.5
20 to 99 employees	7.4	5.4	2.0	3.6	3.0	0.7	9.1	7.4	1.7
100 to 500 employees	8.1	6.0	2.1	4.1	3.4	0.7	10.3	8.5	1.8
Over 500 employees	8.3	6.4	1.9	4.3	3.6	0.7	10.7	9.0	1.7
Job tenure									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
1 to 12 months	6.2	4.4	1.8	2.6	2.1	0.6	6.6	5.1	1.4
Over 1 to 5 years	7.3	5.2	2.1	3.4	2.7	0.7	8.6	6.8	1.8
Over 5 to 9 years	7.9	5.7	2.1	4.0	3.2	0.8	10.0	8.1	1.9
Over 9 to 14 years	7.8	5.9	1.9	4.1	3.4	0.7	10.3	8.5	1.8
Over 14 years	7.7	6.0	1.7	4.3	3.7	0.6	10.7	9.3	1.4
Job status									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Permanent	7.4	5.5	2.0	3.7	3.0	0.7	9.2	7.6	1.7
Non-permanent	6.4	4.6	1.9	3.1	2.4	0.7	7.7	6.1	1.6
Union coverage									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Union member or covered by collective agreement	9.1	7.2	1.9	5.1	4.4	0.8	12.8	10.9	1.9
Non-unionized	6.4	4.4	2.0	2.9	2.3	0.6	7.2	5.7	1.6

Source: Labour Force Survey

* *Absent workers divided by total.*

** *Hours absent divided by hours usually worked.*

† *Inactivity rate multiplied by working days in year (250).*

Table 6: Absence rates for full-time paid workers by province, region and census metropolitan area (CMA), 2003, excluding maternity leave

	Incidence*			Inactivity**			Days lost per worker in year†		
	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities	Total	Own illness or disability	Personal or family responsibilities
	%			%			days		
Province and region									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
Atlantic	7.4	5.7	1.7	3.9	3.3	0.6	9.8	8.3	1.5
Newfoundland and Labrador	7.0	5.5	1.5	4.1	3.6	0.6	10.3	8.9	1.5
Prince Edward Island	6.4	4.7	1.6	3.0	2.5	0.5	7.5	6.3	1.2
Nova Scotia	7.6	5.7	1.9	3.9	3.2	0.7	9.7	8.0	1.7
New Brunswick	7.6	5.9	1.7	4.0	3.5	0.6	10.1	8.6	1.4
Quebec	7.9	6.0	1.9	4.2	3.6	0.6	10.6	9.1	1.5
Ontario	7.1	5.0	2.1	3.3	2.6	0.7	8.2	6.4	1.8
Prairies	7.3	5.2	2.0	3.4	2.7	0.7	8.6	6.9	1.7
Manitoba	7.9	5.9	2.0	3.7	3.1	0.6	9.3	7.8	1.6
Saskatchewan	8.2	6.2	2.0	4.2	3.5	0.7	10.5	8.6	1.8
Alberta	6.8	4.8	2.0	3.1	2.4	0.7	7.9	6.1	1.8
British Columbia	7.2	5.5	1.7	3.9	3.2	0.7	9.6	7.9	1.7
CMA									
Both sexes	**7.3**	**5.4**	**2.0**	**3.6**	**3.0**	**0.7**	**9.1**	**7.4**	**1.7**
All CMAs	7.3	5.4	2.0	3.5	2.8	0.7	8.8	7.1	1.7
St. John's	7.8	6.0	1.7	4.2	3.7	0.5	10.4	9.1	1.3
Halifax	7.3	5.5	1.9	3.3	2.6	0.7	8.1	6.5	1.7
Saint John	8.6	6.7	1.9	4.4	3.8	0.6	10.9	9.4	1.5
Saguenay	7.5	6.3	F	4.5	4.1	F	11.3	10.3	F
Québec	6.9	5.3	1.6	3.5	2.9	0.6	8.8	7.2	1.6
Montréal	8.2	6.1	2.1	4.2	3.6	0.6	10.5	9.0	1.5
Trois-Rivières	7.1	5.4	F	4.0	3.3	F	9.9	8.2	F
Sherbrooke	7.5	5.7	F	4.3	3.7	F	10.6	9.3	F
Gatineau	9.6	7.2	2.4	4.8	4.1	0.6	11.9	10.3	1.6
Ottawa	8.0	5.6	2.3	3.3	2.5	0.8	8.2	6.3	1.9
Greater Sudbury	6.3	4.5	F	3.1	2.5	F	7.8	6.3	F
Toronto	6.9	4.8	2.0	3.1	2.4	0.7	7.8	6.0	1.8
Hamilton	6.9	5.0	2.0	3.5	2.8	0.7	8.7	7.0	1.7
St. Catharines-Niagara	8.5	6.1	2.3	4.0	3.2	0.8	9.9	7.9	2.0
London	6.7	4.7	2.0	3.2	2.4	0.7	7.9	6.1	1.8
Windsor	7.3	4.9	2.4	3.5	2.7	0.8	8.7	6.7	2.0
Kitchener-Waterloo	7.1	5.0	2.1	3.2	2.5	0.7	8.0	6.2	1.7
Oshawa	7.7	5.7	2.0	3.9	3.2	0.7	9.7	7.9	1.8
Thunder Bay	8.8	6.4	F	4.8	3.8	F	12.0	9.5	F
Winnipeg	7.9	6.0	1.9	3.6	3.0	0.5	8.9	7.5	1.4
Regina	8.5	6.4	2.1	4.0	3.3	0.7	10.1	8.3	1.8
Saskatoon	8.0	6.3	1.7	4.1	3.5	0.6	10.2	8.8	1.4
Calgary	6.5	4.5	2.1	2.7	2.1	0.7	6.8	5.2	1.7
Edmonton	6.9	5.0	1.9	3.3	2.6	0.7	8.2	6.5	1.7
Vancouver	6.8	5.1	1.7	3.5	2.9	0.7	8.9	7.1	1.7
Victoria	8.3	6.4	1.9	4.2	3.5	0.7	10.5	8.8	1.7
Non-CMAs	7.3	5.3	1.9	3.9	3.2	0.6	9.7	8.0	1.6
Urban centres	7.6	5.7	1.8	4.0	3.3	0.7	9.9	8.2	1.7

Source: Labour Force Survey

* *Absent workers divided by total.*

** *Hours absent divided by hours usually worked.*

† *Inactivity rate multiplied by working days in year (250).*

Data source and definitions

The data in this article are annual averages from the **Labour Force Survey** (LFS). They refer to full-time employees holding only one job. Part-time, self-employed and unpaid family workers are excluded because they generally have more opportunity to arrange their work schedules around personal or family responsibilities. Multiple jobholders, too, are excluded because it is not possible using LFS data to allocate time lost, or the reason for it, to specific jobs. Women on maternity leave are also excluded. Some human resource practitioners exclude persons on long-term illness or disability leave (exceeding one year) from their attendance management statistics. Such persons are, however, included in Statistics Canada's work absence estimates if they count themselves as employed (that is, they continue to receive partial or full pay from their employer). In 2003, the number of employed persons on such long-term illness or disability leave averaged only 23,000 in a typical week. Their exclusion would have reduced the weekly work absence incidence for illness or disability from 5.4% to 5.2%, the inactivity rate from 3.0% to 2.8%, and days lost per worker that year from 7.4 to 6.9.

Personal reasons for absence are split into two categories: 'own illness or disability' and 'personal or family responsibilities' (caring for own children, caring for elder relative, and other personal or family responsibilities). Absences for these two reasons represented about 26% of all time lost by full-time paid workers each week in 2003. Vacations, which accounted for about 40% of total time away from work, are not counted in this study, nor are statutory holidays, which represented 17%. Maternity leave represented 9% and other reasons, 7%.

The **incidence of absence** is the percentage of full-time paid workers reporting some absence in the reference week. In calculating incidence, the length of work absence—whether an hour, a day, or a full week—is irrelevant.

The **inactivity rate** shows hours lost as a proportion of the usual weekly hours of full-time paid workers. It takes into account both the incidence and length of absence in the reference week.

Days lost per worker are calculated by multiplying the inactivity rate by the estimated number of working days in the year (250).

Reasons for work absences in the LFS

The LFS sets out the following reasons for being away from work:

- own illness or disability
- caring for own children
- caring for elder relative (60 years or older)
- maternity leave (women only)
- other personal or family responsibilities
- vacation
- labour dispute (strike or lockout)
- temporary layoff due to business conditions
- holiday (legal or religious)
- weather
- job started or ended during week
- working short time (because of material shortages, plant maintenance or repair, for instance)
- other

As normally published, personal or family responsibilities consist of caring for own children, caring for elder relative, and other personal or family responsibilities.